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Letter dated 22 July 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to write in connection to my statement delivered today during the Security Council's open debate on the Middle East. As mentioned, my delegation urges the membership of the United Nations to consider this circulated text, included as an annex to the present letter, in addition to the extemporaneous remarks I made before the Council.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Dan **Gillerman**
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Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 22 July 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Statement circulated by the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, in connection to the open debate on the item "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question", on 22 July 2008

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you on your leadership of the Council for this month, and thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe, as always, for his comprehensive briefing.

This will be my final appearance before this august Council as Israel's Permanent Representative to the United Nations. Over the past five and a half years, I have had the privilege to work with many of you, your predecessors, and permanent representatives of many other Member States that served on this Council. I admit that it was not always an easy task. But I want to thank you for your goodwill, initiative and energy as we worked together to minimize difference, build bridges of understanding, and maintain peace and security.

It is in this spirit of partnership and cooperation that I want to reflect, albeit briefly, on developments in the region, and their bearing on the work of this Council — work that will surely continue with my successor and into the future.

Every three months we are called to this room for an open debate on this agenda item: "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question". But let me be clear, this agenda item itself is a phantasm and the debates that follow an illusion. These meetings are completely detached from the daily reality in the Middle East, and serve instead to feed the sometimes insatiable hunger for rhetoric that fuels the business-as-usual mentality here on First Avenue. For the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is to be resolved bilaterally, between the two parties, as is currently being negotiated on the ground.

Indeed, as I have said from this seat on so many occasions, there is a common vision for peace in our region, one that binds Israelis and moderate Palestinians — and other moderate Arab and Muslim countries — together. This is the vision of two States, one Jewish and one Palestinian, each fulfilling the national aspirations of their people, living side-by-side in peace and security. This is the basis for the negotiations today between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas, and only from this framework can an understanding emerge that will bring the two-State vision to fruition. This bilateral process is sacred.

The international community, however, has a role to play in addressing the real threats to regional peace and security, seen most dangerously in the emergence of a nuclear Iran. The Iranian regime is the source of the instability, conflict and extremism that is sweeping across the region, and which demands the full attention of this Council.

The extremist Iranian regime and its terrorist proxies share an insular world view. They advocate maximal demands with minimal engagement, and shun the conventions and norms of the international community, while profanely utilizing our legal and moral discourse. They seek rights for themselves and the peoples they

claim to represent, without shouldering the responsibility of being a member of the international community.

The Council is rightfully engaged on the issue of Iran's quest for nuclear capability, which undoubtedly threatens regional peace and security. But its exporting of terrorism also demands the Council's vigilance and attention. Iran has now positioned itself to our north and south, with Hizbullah and Hamas, respectively, adjusting their sights on Israel.

Despite this Council's call for disbanding militias and terrorist groups and an arms embargo in resolution 1701, the situation south of the Litani River is more dangerous than ever. Hizbullah has operational capabilities beyond its level prior to the outbreak of hostilities two years ago. Arms sent to Hizbullah constantly cross the porous border between Syria and Lebanon. Indeed, States like Syria and Iran actively enable Hizbullah's rearming. This is in contravention of international law, and in violation of Security Council resolutions 1373, 1559 and 1701. The Council must continue to fight the fight for the implementation of resolution 1701, which are in the vital interests of regional peace and security.

In the south, the situation is eerily similar and just as grave. Hamas, using underground tunnels and breaches in the border, has moved mass weaponry into the Gaza Strip, with longer range rockets that can penetrate farther into Israel. These weapons are the benevolence of Teheran. But the perceived lull and "state of calm" is only an opportunity for Hamas to strengthen and prepare itself for more rocket and terrorist attacks against the Jewish State. And Hamas, backed by Iran, so callously and cruelly, still holds Corporal Gilad Shalit captive, refusing to allow humanitarian officials and agencies to visit him.

At the same time, the moderate Palestinian Authority leadership, who Israel is engaged with in daily negotiations, has been unable — or unwilling — to prevent terrorism and extremism from infiltrating its social bloodstream. There are still daily terrorist attempts and attacks in the West Bank and along the southern envelope communities, with weapons smuggling and bomb making continuing with alarming intensity.

As you can see, if we have not yet turned the vision of peace into reality it is not for lack of meetings in this Council, or lack of agreements or United Nations resolutions or international conferences. If we have yet to see the emergence of two States in the region, it is because there is still daily terrorism and violence and hatred. Terrorism is the greatest obstacle to peace and progress, undermining confidence, jeopardizing negotiations, and most importantly threatening our lives and daily security.

For those of us who greatly respect this Council, there is also the unhelpful tendency of some to create linkages between conflicts and blame them all on Israel. Surely, it is obvious by now that the conflict involving Israel is not the longest, or the bloodiest, or even the most widespread of the many, troubling, conflicts around the world. While it is true that many of them are symptoms of the same malaise — the absence of a Middle Eastern order to replace the old systems of the past — they are independent; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict does not cause other conflicts, just as its resolution cannot resolve the others.

In fact, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the consequence, not the cause, of the ideologies of intolerance and hatred that plague our region — and have taken

control of the Palestinians in the form of Hamas and the Lebanese in the form of Hizbullah. It is the ideologies of intolerance and hatred in the form of regimes like Syria and Iran that have led to violence and instability elsewhere in the region. Hence, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot truly be the single most combustible or galvanizing issue. To believe in this myth of linkage is to misunderstand the past, to misinterpret the present, to mistakenly envision the future.

Consider as well what happened in March, earlier this year, when a Palestinian terrorist murdered eight Israeli boys in cold blood at a rabbinical seminary in Jerusalem. This was undoubtedly a heinous act of terrorism — plain and simple. And yet — as you surely recall — despite condemnations by the Secretary-General, many Member States, and members of the Security Council, including the Presidency, this Council could not reach consensus on denouncing the attack, due to the shallow politics of one member. This is also in spite of many precedents where the Council condemned attacks against civilians.

Terrorism must always be condemned — no matter the perpetrator, no matter the victim. The Council must remain vigilant in its condemnation of terrorism. Silence will only undermine, and ultimately erode, the Council's legitimacy and credibility.

But even when terrorism is condemned, the tendency is to do so within the same breath as condemning legitimate actions in self-defence, under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. This false equation is legally dubious and morally skewed. A clear distinction must be made between terrorism and legitimate self-defence.

Take for example how Palestinian terrorists directly target Israeli civilians, and even use their own civilians as human shields. Hamas' brutality towards its own people can be seen in the daily violence on the streets of Gaza. Terrorists produce, transport and launch rockets and mortars from inside densely populated residential areas. And by firing on border-crossings and abusing humanitarian convoys, the terrorists cynically force closures, which hamper efforts to deliver humanitarian aid and relief.

Similarly, last week, the world got another taste — or rather distaste — for the huge gap between the ethos of terrorists and the values of States.

There is something morally repugnant in the hero's welcome given to the most infamous of the Lebanese prisoners released last week. Samir Kuntar had been sentenced to 542 years in prison for killing four people during a raid in Israel in 1979. Kuntar executed a father, Danny Haran, in front of his four-year-old daughter. Then he killed the little girl by smashing her head against a rock with the butt of a rifle.

This is the monster that Palestinians hail as a resistance hero; the terror incarnate that Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh called a "huge hero who sacrificed 30 years of his life for the Palestinian issue"; the celebrity that Lebanon's president and prime minister saluted as a liberated freedom fighter. And, of course, this is a man that Iran sent a representative to greet and embrace, the kind of person any civilized nation would be embarrassed to be associated with. It is inexplicable that in the streets of Gaza City, Beirut, Damascus and Teheran, candy was passed out to children, as if to teach them how to behave when a murderer goes free and others suffer.

In Israel, we surely did not celebrate; we cried. We wept over the coffins of our boys, Udi Goldwasser and Eldad Regev. This Council called for their immediate release in resolution 1701. Many of you even met with the families of the kidnapped soldiers, looked into their eyes, and saw their pain. I thank those of you who lobbied and worked for their freedom from the bottom of my heart. Thank you for your compassion and humanity.

These past two years have been long and painful ones for us. Hizbullah held the Goldwasser and Regev families — and all the people of Israel — captive to fear and doubt. We never knew how Udi and Eldad were doing; Hizbullah held us and them in limbo, refusing to report on their condition. In refusing to allow the Red Cross to see the Israeli soldiers, Hizbullah created an unbearable humanitarian situation. Today, peace of mind has finally been given to the Regev and Goldwasser families, but it is in marked contrast to the responses from elsewhere in the region.

As a final thought, I want to return to where I began, on the importance of minimizing the gap between rhetoric and reality. That begins, first and foremost, with ending the differential treatment of Israel.

My delegation does not ask for special treatment. Israel, like any other country in this room, should be subject to criticism and debate on a fair and impartial basis. We have tried to engage the international community with openness and transparency. We have held periodical briefings for members of the Council to hear updates from intelligence and military experts on the ground. But even these briefings, which are vital and necessary in order to understand the real situation in the region, are not even attended by all the Council's members for political reasons.

Moreover, all too often the finger is pointed at Israel without any consideration as to the whole picture. While the Council is thankfully not beleaguered by it, the automatic majority in the General Assembly ruins the reputation and credibility of the United Nations. At times, we have seen members of this automatic majority attempt to even bully the Council by circulating proposals and texts that received no prior endorsement from the group.

I want to quote for you from the words of former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who in his final address to the United Nations told this Council:

> "Some may feel satisfaction at repeatedly passing General Assembly resolutions or holding conferences that condemn Israel's behaviour. But one can also ask whether such steps bring any tangible relief or benefit to the Palestinians. There have been decades of resolutions. There has been a proliferation of special committees, sessions, and Secretariat divisions and units. Has any of this had an effect on Israel's policies, other than to strengthen the belief in Israel and among many of its supporters that this great Organization is too one-sided to be allowed a significant role in the Middle East peace process?"

All my delegation asks is that the international community stand by its own values and lofty principles, beginning with the eternal words of the Charter "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small".

It is not too late to turn hope into reality. It is not too late to march on that road to peace, but only if we have the strength to defend its agreed principles and the

courage to confront its enemies. We must see that there is more that binds us together than tears us apart.

The international community has shown it can have the determination and political will to do what is necessary. I have fond memories of many successes where we managed to work together and cooperate in the spirit of partnership and mutual understanding. I look to moments like the General Assembly's adoption of the resolution on Holocaust remembrance, and take pride in the fact that there was broad consensus and universal support. And I take comfort in the recognition that so many challenges require global solutions. On issues like terrorism and climate change and many others, the international community has agreed that no country can fly alone.

As I did when I assumed my functions as Permanent Representative, and as Israel did when it became a Member State 59 years go, I want to reaffirm our profound belief in and commitment to the ideals of peace and national independence; of social progress, of democracy, and of cultural dynamism. Israel, as a very proud member of this world body, with its many imperfections, but perhaps with a few virtues, is forever poised to contribute to our common defence of the human spirit against the perils of oppression, conflict, and despair.